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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the issue of developmental education in the community college. Across the country, states are increasingly discouraging four-year institutions from offering remedial education. The City University of New York and the California State University system are phasing out remedial instruction. In the 1999-2000 academic year, public two-year colleges served over 345,000 resident alien students, while public four-year institutions served fewer than 245,000 resident aliens. Approximately 60% of resident aliens who were first-time students at public two-year colleges in 1999-2000 took at least one remedial course. This paper defines remedial education as those courses in reading, writing, and mathematics offered to students lacking the necessary academic skills to perform college-level work. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) sent surveys to 50 states for this study; 47 were returned. Highlights of the findings follow. Every state allows community colleges to fund remedial education using state funds. However, several states provide no funding specifically earmarked for remedial education. Forty-two of the responding states allow state financial aid to be used to pay for remedial services. Only Maryland requires students to complete remedial courses before taking college-level courses. This paper also details states' data collection and reporting tracking systems and current policy issues. (Author/NB)

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STATE POLICIES

on Community College Remedial Education:

FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE POLICY CENTER

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SEPTEMBER 2002

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INTRODUCTION

As "open-door" institutions, community colleges have long had to educate students who are not prepared for college-level work. Across the country, states and localities are asking community colleges to take on an even greater share of remedial instruction. At least 10 states prevent or at least discourage public four-year institutions from offering remedial education. These states are Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, New Mexico, South Carolina, Utah and Virginia. In three of these states – Colorado, New Mexico and Utah – four-year institutions receive no state funding for remedial instruction. In Louisiana, under a new master plan beginning in 2005, four-year institutions will not be able to enroll students needing remediation. Massachusetts has instituted a new policy that four-year institutions can enroll up to 10% of their students in remedial instruction. Above that percentage, universities are required to refer students needing remediation to community colleges.

In a much-publicized move, the City University of New York (CUNY) is phasing out remedial instruction at the system's four-year institutions and requiring students who need remediation to first attend community colleges. A similar transfer is under way in the California State University system.

These trends are likely to increase the already high level of enrollment in remedial, or what educators call "developmental," education courses at community colleges. In a survey of undergraduate institutions in fall 1995, the National Center for Education Statistics found that 41% of first-time students took at least one remedial course in reading, writing or mathematics (NCES, 1996). Twenty-two percent of students at public four-year institutions were enrolled in at least one remedial course. At community colleges, the proportion of freshmen taking remedial courses was even higher.

Many of the community college students who require remedial instruction are recent high school graduates. Others are working adults who have been out of school for some time[1] or are immigrants or refugees. In the 1999-2000 academic year, public two-year colleges served over 345,000 resident alien students, while public four-year colleges and universities (NCES, 2001) served fewer than 245,000 resident aliens. Approximately 60% of resident aliens who were first-time students at public two-year colleges in 1999-2000 took at least one remedial course (NCES, 2001).

Given the large numbers of students involved, many of whom are minority, low-income or disadvantaged, the success rate of community colleges in preparing remedial students to enter and succeed in college-level work has profound implications for their effectiveness in expanding access to higher education. More than a quarter of community college students who are required to take remedial courses fail to complete their remedial coursework (NCES, 1996: Table 6). In a study of college transcripts, Clifford Adelman (1998) found that the more remedial courses students are required to take, the less likely they are to earn degrees. Forty-five percent of students who earned more than 10 credits at a two- and/or four-year institution and took two remedial courses earned either an

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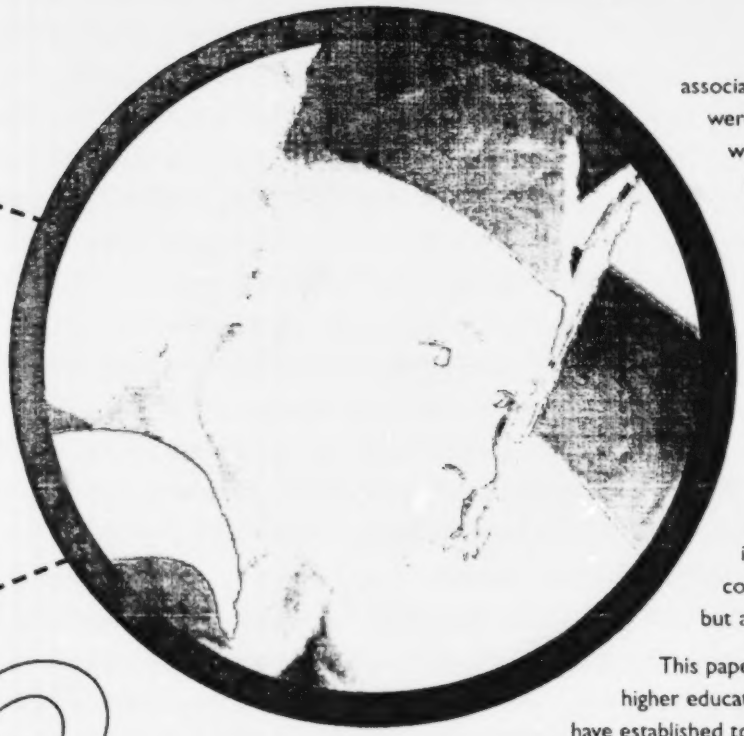

associate or bachelor's degree by the time they were 30. This compares to 60% of students who took no remedial courses. Adelman found that students who are required to take remedial instruction in reading are most likely to need extensive remediation and less likely to earn a degree.[2]

There is considerable variation among community colleges in how remedial education is organized and taught (Grubb, 1999; Perin, 2002). One key source of this variation is that the policies by which community colleges are governed vary by state. State policy is a key determinant not only of how community colleges teach remedial courses but also of how effective they are in doing so.

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This paper presents findings from a survey of state higher education officials on policies the various states have established to guide and support remedial education at community colleges. The survey was conducted by the Center for Community College Policy at the Education Commission of the States (ECS) in fall 2001. ECS conducted this survey as part of a larger project, funded by the Ford Foundation, aimed at promoting the development of state policies that facilitate efforts by community colleges to serve as "bridges" for disadvantaged students to both higher education and career-path employment.

For the purpose of the survey, "remedial education" is defined as those courses in reading, writing or mathematics offered to students lacking the necessary academic skills to perform college-level work. The definition does not include Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED or English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

Forty-seven states responded to the survey. Hawaii, Idaho and Montana did not respond. In states that have a separate community college board or association and state higher education board, ECS sent the survey to both. The community college board or association and the state higher education board in 16 states responded to the remediation survey. Where there are discrepancies between the responses of the community college agency and the higher education board (suggesting a difference in policies governing four-year and two-year institutions), we recorded the response of the community college board, given our primary interest in community colleges. The following sections summarize the main findings of the survey.

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FINDINGS

Funding of Remedial Education

State funding. Every state allows community colleges to fund remedial education using state funds. However, several states provide no funding specifically earmarked for remedial education. For example, in Michigan, each institution decides how much of its general fund appropriation to use for remediation. It is significant that even though they are not required to provide remedial education, virtually every community college does so. In most states (40), students pay at least some of the costs of remedial instruction. In at least one-third of the states, local institutions subsidize remedial programs with their own funds.

An earlier ECS 50-state survey of community college finance found that remedial education classes generate proportionately less state funding than regular credit courses in Georgia and Illinois (ECS, 2000). In Arkansas, Massachusetts and Nevada, remedial courses generate a higher weight in the enrollment funding formula than non-remedial college programs.

Use of financial aid. Most responding states (42) allow state financial aid to be used to pay for remedial courses. Only four states – Alaska, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Wyoming – prohibit the use of state aid for remedial instruction.

Credit for remedial courses. Most respondents indicated that remedial courses count for "institutional credit" for use in calculating enrollment funding. With only a couple of exceptions, most states will not grant degree credit for remedial courses. The exceptions are limited to courses that count toward Associate of Applied Arts or other "non-transferable" occupational degrees. No state will grant baccalaureate transfer credit for remedial courses.

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Remedial Education Policies

Placement policies. In 20 states, policies regarding placement in remedial courses are determined at the state level by statute, board policy or some combination thereof. Seven states have a state-mandated college placement exam: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming. In the other states, the choice of placement exam is left to individual institutions. The community colleges in Maryland have agreed on a common placement exam and cut-off score to determine whether students should be referred to remedial instruction. No state uses high school exit exams to determine placement in college remedial courses. This suggests that standards for high school completion and college placement are generally not aligned.

Twenty-one states require students who do not meet the minimum college-level performance criteria to take remedial education. In California, Maine and South Carolina, community college students who do not meet the minimum basic skills required are advised to take remedial courses, but are not required to do so. In Connecticut and several other states, students who enroll in fewer than 12 credits are not required to take remedial courses.

Concurrent enrollment. Maryland is the only responding state that requires students to complete remedial coursework before taking college-level courses. In many states, students can take remedial courses in conjunction with occupational programs, but must complete remedial coursework before taking general education courses.

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Limits on time and course repeats. Six states impose a time limit on the completion of remedial courses as follows: Colorado (30 semester hours), Georgia (four semesters of a given subject area), Massachusetts (one year), Oklahoma (24 credit hours), South Carolina (30 credit hours) and Texas (27 credit hours). Community college students in California have no limit on how long it takes to complete remedial courses, while students in the state university system do face such a limit. Seven states limit the number of times a student can repeat a remedial course, or at least the number of times the state will pay for course repeats, as follows (number in parentheses is number of repeats after the first try): California (1), Florida (2), Illinois (1), Louisiana (2), Tennessee (1), Virginia (2) and Washington (2).

Strong state control. Eight states exert a relatively high degree of control over remedial education: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming. In the other states, most decisions regarding remedial education are left to the discretion of local institutions.

Data Collection and Reporting on Remedial Education

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Required reporting. Thirty-seven responding states require higher education institutions to report data on enrollment in remedial courses to the state. Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of entering students who require remediation at two- and four-year institutions in their state. Table 1 (see page 7) shows the responses. Twenty-nine states gave estimates. For two-year colleges, the percentages reported range from 10.4% of entering students in Alabama to 70.9% in Tennessee. The figures reported for four-year institutions range from 5.5% in Connecticut to 50% in Indiana.

State tracking systems. Twenty-two states have information systems in place that allow them to track specific information on remedial students, such as the number who complete the prescribed remedial course sequence or who are successful in subsequent college-level courses and go on to complete a degree or certificate. (Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming). Such systems are under development in four states: Kansas, North Carolina, North Dakota and South Dakota.

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Current Policy Issues in Community College Remedial Education

The survey asked respondents to indicate which policy issues related to community college remedial education have been debated by policymakers or enacted as legislation or higher education board policy in the past two years. The following table summarizes the responses.

Issue	States Where Issue Debated	States Where Legislation or Board Policy Enacted
Mandatory remediation for those who fail exams	6	9
Making community colleges responsible for remedial education	16	6
Rewarding colleges for remedial program performance	5	5
Requiring exit scores for college-level work	9	4
Disseminating best practices in remediation	9	4
Level of funding for remedial education	14	3
Limiting number of remedial courses/credit hours	7	3
Limiting the number of remedial course repeats	4	2
Eliminating concurrent remedial – college enrollment	6	2
Contracting out remedial education	9	2
Charging K-12 systems for graduates needing remediation	14	1
Serving students with severe academic deficiencies	16	1
Limiting or eliminating remedial courses in higher education	11	0

While several of these issues were debated in a fair number of states in the past couple of years, relatively little policy action was taken with respect to any of them. The three issues generating the most state policy actions in the past two years were mandatory remediation for students who fail placement exams, making community colleges responsible for remedial education and rewarding institutions for the performance of their remedial programs. In some states, such as Illinois and Ohio, remedial policies were enacted some years ago and have not been prominent issues recently. Three issues generated debate but little action among responding states: charging K-12 systems for graduates needing remediation, serving students with severe academic deficiencies, and limiting or eliminating remedial courses in higher education. The fact that no state acted on the latter issue suggests that, however distasteful to some policymakers, remedial instruction is likely to remain a prominent part of higher education, especially at community colleges.

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CONCLUSION

It is clear from these findings that the number of students at America's community colleges who require at least some remediation is high and will only increase as states further discourage four-year institutions from providing remedial instruction. The majority of states (37) require higher education institutions to report data on enrollment in remedial education to the state. More than half (29) were able to give what seem to be precise estimates of the percentage of entering students who require remediation. These estimates vary widely across states, suggesting that the regulations and standards by which students are directed to remedial education also vary among states.

Even more important than the number of students who enter remedial education are the numbers who complete it and go on to succeed in college-level study. Twenty-two states have in place information systems that allow them to monitor what becomes of students who enter college through remedial programs. Four other states are developing such systems. Key questions to be answered in these states include which institutions are most successful in preparing remedial students to transition into and succeed in college-level offerings, and why are these programs effective. Comparing the performance of institutions and different state systems across the nation is a more formidable task, given the wide variation in the information collected by the various states. Nevertheless, the relative rate of success of remedial education at community colleges in different states is important, since it makes it possible to address the question of what state policies or sets of policies are effective in encouraging community colleges to offer remedial programs that promote student success. This is a key question for future research.

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TABLE

State Estimates of Percentage of Entering Students Requiring Remediation

State	Institutions Report on Enrollment in Remedial Education?	% of Entering 2-Year Students Who Need Remediation	% of Entering 4-Year Students Who Need Remediation
AK	No	–	–
AL[1]	Yes	10.4%	NR
AR[2]	Yes	70.6%	43.3%
AZ	Yes	–	–
CA[3]	Yes	–	–
CO	Yes	18%	–
CT[4]	Yes	20%	5.5%
DE[5]	No	65%	–
FL[6]	Yes	58.6%	7.5%
GA[7]	Yes	49.2%	8.1%
IA	Yes	–	–
IL[8]	Yes	26.5%	6.9%
IN[9]	Yes	70%	50%
KS	Yes	–	–
KY[10]	Yes	52%	–
LA	Yes	66%	35%
MA[11]	No	50%	10%
MD[12]	Yes	See note 12	See note 12
ME	No	NR	NR
MI	No	–	–
MN[13]	Yes	45%	21%
MO	Yes	–	–
MS[14]	No	NR	20%
NC[15]	Yes	50%	11.4%
ND	No	–	–
NE	Yes	0%-70%	NR
NH	No	–	–
NJ	Yes	–	–
NM[16]	Yes	50%	–
NV[17]	Yes	32.4%	29.2%
NY	Yes	–	–
OH[18]	Yes	43% math; 35% English	9% math; 13% English
OK[19]	Yes	48.3%	30.2%
OR	Yes	–	–
PA[20]	No	38.2% math; 26.5% English	
RI[21]	Yes	55%-65%	–
SC	Yes	25%-30%	–
SD[22]	Yes	–	21.9%
TN	Yes	70.9%	43.3%
TX	Yes	61.3%	30.1%
UT	Yes	–	–
VA[23]	Yes	36%	NR
VT	No	–	–
WA	Yes	38%	22%
WI[24]	Yes	30%	11.1% math; 6.7% English
WV	Yes	57.6%	35%
WY[25]	Yes		16.5%

The 37 states that responded estimated that 79% of students entering community colleges will need remedial education.

– = Data not available. NR = No response.

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NOTES *on Table:*

1. In Alabama, two-year institutions report information on enrollment in remedial courses whereas four-year institutions do not.
2. Arkansas data are for fall 1999.
3. In California, admission to community colleges is open and students are not required to be assessed upon admission.
4. Connecticut does not track enrollment in remedial courses by entering students. The numbers given are the number of students taking remedial courses as a percentage of all students in two- and four-year institutions, respectively.
5. Delaware's figure for two-year colleges is an estimate.
6. Florida's numbers are from an annual report, titled *Readiness for College Report*, on the remediation needs of prior-year high school graduates. The report applies to public institutions only. The numbers are for the 1999-2000 academic year.
7. Georgia's numbers are for first-time freshmen in fall 2000.
8. Illinois's estimates for two-year colleges come from two recent studies. One found that 26.5% of community college first-time freshmen enrolled in at least one remedial course. Fourteen (14.1) percent of all public community college students enrolled in at least one remedial course. The figure for four-year college students is the number of students taking remedial courses as a percentage of all four-year college undergraduate students.
9. The number of students at four-year institutions who require remedial instruction varies greatly by institution.
10. Kentucky's figure is *for* first-time freshmen seeking to enter degree programs in fall 2001. Two-year colleges in Kentucky are permitted to set separate standards for certificate and diploma programs. The percentage of students requiring remediation for these programs varies by institution and program.
11. The Massachusetts figure for two-year colleges is an estimate of the number of students who take two or more developmental education courses. Massachusetts has instituted a new policy that allows four-year institutions to enroll up to 10% of their students in remedial instruction. Above that percentage, students are referred to community colleges.
12. For two-year colleges in Maryland, the figures are as follows: Math - Core: 27%, Non-Core: 41%; English - Core: 16%, Non-Core: 28%; Reading - Core: 16%, Non-Core: 28%. Core is defined as students who in high school took four or more English, three or more mathematics, three or more social science and history, two or more natural science, and two or more foreign language courses.

    For four-year colleges in Maryland, the figures are as follows: Math - Core: 13%, Non-Core: 21%; English - Core: 7%, Non-Core: 11%; Reading - Core: 8%, Non-Core: 13%.
13. Minnesota figures refer to Minnesota high school graduates in 1998 and 1999 who took one or more developmental courses in the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 academic years at two- and four-year institutions, respectively.
14. Mississippi's figures refer to first-time freshmen in 2000-01.
15. The North Carolina figure for two-year colleges is from the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). The figure for four-year institutions is from the University of North Carolina. The NCCCS reported a figure of 17% for the percentage of freshmen at four-year institutions in the state who require remediation.
16. The New Mexico figure for two-year colleges is an estimate.
17. Nevada's figures are based on a report of the number of recent high school graduates enrolled in remedial courses in either two- or four-year institutions in the state.
18. Ohio's figures refer to recent high school graduates.
19. Oklahoma's figures refer to first-time freshmen in FY00. The figure for comprehensive universities in the state was 18.9%.
20. Pennsylvania's figures refer to community college students in fall 1999 who required remediation. Note that the colleges use different standards to determine which students require remediation.
21. The Rhode Island figure for two-year colleges is an estimate. The only information institutions are required to report is the total number of enrollments in remedial studies.

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22. South Dakota does not have state two-year colleges. The figure for four-year college students is the percentage of the 1999-2000 unduplicated headcount of undergraduates in the state's public four-year institutions.

23. Virginia's figures refer to the percentage of entering students who enrolled in one or more remedial courses in fall 2000.

24. Wisconsin's figure for two-year colleges is an estimate of the percentage of students entering the Wisconsin Technical College System who need some type of remediation. The figures for four-year institutions refer to the percentage of freshmen required to take remediation in 1998-99.

25. Wyoming's figure refers to the percentage of entering first-year students registered as "remedial" in fall 2000.

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ENDNOTES

[1] In general, older students are less likely to take remedial courses than younger students who have recently graduated from high school. One reason is that older students are more likely to take non-transferable vocational courses, which often do not have remedial requirements. Younger students are more likely to intend to transfer to a bachelor's-degree program and be in an academic program that requires unprepared students to enroll in remedial instruction. Also, older students are more likely to attend college on a part-time basis. Many community colleges do not require part-time students to take remedial courses. Using data on student transcripts from the High School and Beyond study of the sophomore class of 1980, researchers at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College estimated that 63% of community college students and 40% of students at four-year colleges take at least one remedial course (Bailey 2001). The High School and Beyond survey follows a cohort of younger students into postsecondary education and so reflects the overall higher rate of participation in remedial education among younger students. (Thanks to Greg Kienzl of the Community College Research Center for his assistance in interpreting these findings.)

[2] Two more recent studies find that, among the poorest and least prepared community college students, extensive remedial education in reading may increase the chances that they transfer to a four-year institution (Merisotis and Phipps, 2000; Cabrera et al., 2001).

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